



~ An Emperor, a Priest, and a Goddess ~

## The Hidden History of Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day -- that time of year when lovers (and wannabe's) are frantic, wondering whether to splurge on the heart-shaped box of chocolates, over-priced flowers, or the predictable greeting cards. Ever wonder how the madness all got started?

The history of Valentine's Day began with the ancient Festival of Lupercalia which honored the founding of Rome. To insure the fertility of the land, the festival also celebrated the erotic love that was the special domain of Juno, the Roman goddess of love and marriage (who was also known as the [Greek Goddess Hera](#)). The month February was even named in her honor -- the word comes from the Latin word "febres", meaning feverish or febrile.

Held on the hillside near the Lupercallus ("Wolf-Cave"), where Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were raised as infants by a pack of wolves, the festivities were held on February 15 each year. Led by a pagan priest, the activities included "whipping" all the women to ensure their fertility.

Another part of the celebration involved a lottery in which the names of the unmarried females were drawn by the eligible bachelors and the couples were paired for the following year to honor the goddess Juno -- obviously a prototype of matchmaker.com.

---

Turn the clock forward to the third century and you find Claudius II serving as the Emperor of Rome, which by that time had seen its glory days and was now being threatened on its borders by the Goths.

Claudius had a problem on his hands. He definitely needed his army to be at full strength. He felt that married men weren't very good soldiers, given their tendency to go A.W.O.L. when it was time to harvest the crops or whenever they felt the urge for a conjugal visit.

So concerned was the Emperor that he used his authority to ban the practice of marriage. And he banned the Festival of Lupercalia as well, since it was obviously contributing to the high incidence of marriage that seemed to be destroying his militia.

For the first time, the pagan Emperor and the growing Christian church found themselves on the same side of an argument. The Church was also opposed to the pagan festival of Lupercalia, objecting to its lustfulness, and especially the practice of the lottery.

Yet it was a dangerous time to be a Christian priest. A parish priest named Valentine was part of the Christian underground and, in defiance of the Emperor's edict, continued to marry couples in secret. He was soon found out and carried off to prison.

There must have been something very "special" about Valentine. The Emperor himself supposedly took the time to visit him in prison and tried to convert him to the worship of the ancient pagan deities. He failed miserably, and Valentine was executed on the February 14, in the year 270.

---

Church policy in dealing with the ancient religions often included a strategy of incorporating, rather than just banning, the pagan traditions. And it proved to be an effective strategy. Many of our contemporary holiday rituals and traditions are actually based on ancient pagan celebrations.

Anxious to end the lusty Lupercalia that they saw as a "festival of the flesh", the Church was a bit more subtle than the Emperor in their approach to getting rid of it. Having a "Saint's Day" celebration for the martyred Valentine, and holding it a day earlier than the pagan festival, was a clever idea indeed.

But like so many other holidays, Valentine's Day was co-opted once more, this time by secular, commercial interests. And so today we find ourselves sending valentines to all sorts of people, even those for whom we haven't the slightest marital, romantic, or lustful feelings . . . and wonder where all the passion in our lives has gone.

And what about that cute little guy in diapers who goes around shooting arrows loaded with aphrodisiacs? Hard to believe he once was an actual god! You can read more about him in the myths of the [Greek goddess Psyche](#).

---

You can read more about the pagan origins of this holiday at:

[The Pagan History of Valentine's Day](#)

Sharon Turnbull, Ph.D, is the author of [Goddess Gift: Discover Your Personal Goddess Type](#) , a book about how to connect with your inner goddess and start living the life you were always meant to live. She is also the creatrix of the popular online personality assessments, The [Goddess Quiz](#) and The [Greek Gods Quiz](#) for men.

Sharon invites you to subscribe to [The Goddess Gift Newsletter](#), a free monthly e-zine that combines mythology, archetypal psychology, personal growth and just plain fun. You can visit her websites at: <http://www.goddessgift.com> and <http://www.men-myths-minds.com>